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the care of the insane is important, the prevention of insanity should receive even greater attention. One of the most important of the preventable causes of insanity is syphilis. The superintendent of California State Hospitals states that 1,010 patients out of 6,935 admitted to state institution in the last two years were syphilitic—14.5 per cent. He states further, "In not all persons admitted who are syphilitic is it possible to connect the mental trouble with the syphilitic disease, but of the 1,010 syphilitics admitted 554, or 54 per cent, were victims of parietic dementia, a definite result of syphilis and an incurable and fatal form of mental trouble. Thus out of the 6,935 cases admitted, 553, or 8 per cent, were parietics with syphilis as the undoubted cause. Not more than 2 or 3 per cent of syphilitics develop parietic dementia, but the latter is such a hopeless and fatal form of disease that prevention of the cause is of vital importance." While there are many other factors entering into the cause of insanity, this one is of special importance from the public health point of view.—*California State Board of Health Bulletin*. From *Public Health*, March, 1917, Lansing, Mich.

Syphilis and Society.—Obviously it approaches the platitudinous to state that venereal diseases are a menace to society. It would be no exaggeration to assert that these diseases are the greatest source of danger to health known, and that if they could be stamped out, or even effectively controlled, the world would not only be a better place in which to live, but much suffering by the innocent would be avoided. The control of venereal disease is essentially a public health problem, and one of which a successful solution seems almost impossible. In Europe conditions have greatly increased the prevalence of these so-called society diseases, and efforts are being centered upon the determination of means whereby the "plague" may be stayed.

In America the problem is becoming quite as serious, especially since the measures taken to check the spread of syphilis and gonorrhea have not met with any conspicuous success.

With regard to the regulation of syphilis, we may well ask, why is it that the question presents so many and seemingly insurmountable difficulties? Much is known concerning the disease, probably more than is known of any other single malady. As Dr. William Allen Pusey points out in the very excellent January number of the *American Journal of Syphilis*—a new publication of a very high order devoted to this particular disease—we are acquainted with all the essential facts which are necessary to an intelligent sanitary attack upon it. Indeed there is at our disposal the means for an overwhelmingly strong sanitary campaign against the disease. At the outset it may be conceded that if syphilis were a purely medical problem, there would be no particular necessity to provide for its effective sanitary control; inasmuch as this is not the case, it is difficult to understand why measures of known efficiency have not been more actively employed. It would appear that the necessary steps in this direction should be taken without delay. The truth of the situation really is, however, that syphilis is more than a sanitary problem, and it is this which has presented the chief stumbling block to the realization of success in the struggle with this disease. As a matter of fact, it is as much a social question as a sanitary one, and on account of the disease being in the main venereal in origin, concerns man in his most intimate social relations. The victim of the malady, even though innocent, as a consequence of the invariable suspicion

attached to its acquirement, spares no effort to keep his condition secret, and it is this aspect of the situation that renders any sanitary campaign waxed against it so difficult to conduct.—From *American Medicine*, Feb., 1917.

Courts and Public Health.—Social justice should be evidenced in court decisions. With the development of new ideas and ideals in the body politic there should be a reflection of public sentiment in the interpretation of laws which were established previous to the birth of the new point of view. It is proper that courts basing their decisions and opinions upon established law should be conservative in breaking with the past. To alter statutes, as rapidly as the communal opinion is changed, would soon breed chaos and disorder. There is, however, a distinct tendency for our judicial authorities to take cognizance of the needs of society and to interpret liberally the powers and duties of health departments, legislatures and philanthropic social organizations seeking to improve the public health. In *Public Health Reports*, March 30, 1917, is a digest of judicial opinions published during the calendar year 1916. As illustrative of the advance made through law, a few items merit more than passing notice.

The United States Supreme Court decided that Congress has power "to keep the channels of interstate commerce free from the carriage of injurious or fraudulently branded articles and to choose appropriate means to that end," and to forbid the shipment in interstate commerce of drugs which are accompanied by false and fraudulent statements regarding their curative effects.

Numerous errors in judgment are bound to result in the mad rush to enact health measures and there is much justice in the decisions:—"To be valid as a health measure a statute or ordinance must provide real protection to the public health;" "ordinances should be reasonable and not unnecessarily burdensome."

A serious question arises from the decision that the contracting of typhoid fever by employes from drinking impure water furnished by the employers is an accident. On the same theory a city supplying an impure and polluted water occasioning the development of typhoid fever among its citizens might be held responsible and damages recovered.

The New Jersey Court of Chancery issued a decision that a marriage cannot be annulled because of fraudulent concealment by one party of his or her physical condition "unless the disease is of such a nature as to render contact seriously dangerous to the other party." Application of this brings up a wide field of inquiry and affords opportunities for many suits for annulment.

In the field of workmen's compensation there are many contradictions. Occupational diseases have not been included in most of the workmen's compensation laws, wherefore the interpretation as to what constitutes an accident or personal injury and what is to be regarded as a disease have been made the basis of various decisions. On the one hand, pneumonia has been held to be a personal injury, while lead-poisoning has been regarded as a disease. Tuberculosis and ivy-poisoning also have been deemed to be accidental injuries arising out of and in the course of employment. These varying interpretations naturally depend upon differences in the wording of the various state laws. It is unfortunate that greater uniformity has not been secured so as to enable the construction by the Supreme Court of one state to serve as the law in another state.—From *American Medicine*, April, 1917.